

Harrison, James M., 1953. On the Significance of Variations of Pattern in Birds. *Ibid.* 73; 37-40.

Harrison, James M., 1959. Comments on a Wigeon X Northern Shoveler Hybrid. *Ibid.* 79; 142-151.

The status of *Centropus toulou wahlbergi* C. Grant

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Centropus toulou wahlbergi C. Grant, *Bull. B.O.C.* 35, 1915, p. 99, with type locality Umslango, Port Natal = Umhlanga Rocks, Durban, is generally recognised as representing an endemic South African race of this widely distributed Indo-African and Malagasy coucal, and is so recognised by Peters (1940), (who provisionally referred Transvaal birds to this race), Roberts (1940), Vincent (1952), Clancey (1953), McLachlan and Liversidge (1957), Smithers *et al.* (1957) and Mackworth-Praed and Grant (1962).

In the course of a joint study undertaken with Mr. C. W. Benson and Mr. C. M. N. White into rifts and river valleys as zoogeographical barriers in South-Central and East Africa, (Benson, Irwin and White in press), the status of the populations of this highly localised species were investigated, as *C. t. wahlbergi* was more or less generally supposed to reach its distributional limit on the northern edge of the Mashonaland plateau.

Generally speaking this coucal is poorly represented in collections. However, it has been possible to assemble some 22 skins, consisting of all housed in the National Museum of Southern Rhodesia; the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria (kindly loaned through Mr. O. P. M. Prozesky) and in the Museu Dr. Alvaro de Castro, Lourenço Marques. I have also been able to examine material recently collected by Major Melvin Traylor for the Chicago Natural History Museum. Of the total number of specimens available, only those in adult breeding dress have been of use for taxonomic purposes. This series comprises a female in non-breeding dress and an immature male from Lake Rukwa, Tanganyika Territory; three breeding dress males and three similarly plumaged females from Northern Rhodesia, plus a male and female in non-breeding dress and one juvenile female from that Territory. From Southern Rhodesia there are two females in breeding dress from Mashonaland; from Nyasaland a male and two females in breeding dress; and from Ngamiland in the northern Bechuanaland Protectorate I have seen a recently collected pair in breeding dress. Unfortunately the only South African material available comprises an adult male in breeding dress from Roodeval in the Transvaal and a juvenile male from northern Zululand; in addition a single adult breeding plumaged female has been examined from extreme southern Portuguese East Africa. A female in breeding dress from Sokotu in Nigeria has also been available for comparison.

The original description of *C. t. wahlbergi* was based on an unsexed bird in breeding dress, stated to differ from *Centropus toulou grillii* Hartlaub, *J.f.O.* 9, 1861: p. 13, Gabon, by having the entire head, except the ear-coverts, glossy blue-black, without the green sheen, but of not quite so deep a blue as is shown in the type of *Centropus toulou caeruleiceps* Neumann, *J.f.O.* 52, 1904; p. 380, Lake Abaya, Abyssinia, but with the blue of the head sharply defined, not merging gradually into the colour of

the back. The mantle is also stated to be chestnut, rather darker than the wing-coverts and altogether lacking the dark colour of a bird from Nyasaland.

Though only two breeding dress specimens have been available from South Africa, south of the Limpopo River drainage, they in no way differ from the more extensive material from further north in the Rhodesias, Nyasaland and the Bechuanaland Protectorate. All have the same blue-black sheen on the head, sides of face, nape and chest, and are not oily green as is generally stated. However, an adult from the Mzimba District and another from Dedza in Nyasaland, do have an oily green gloss, less obviously bluish, but the differences are not great and can only be seen in certain lights. Again in respect of the mantle colour, no appreciable differences are apparent, either between Nyasaland birds as claimed in the original description, and those of South Africa proper, or of the populations of the Rhodesias and Bechuanaland. All have the mantle below the iridescent nape an umber brown, but there is a considerable amount of individual variation depending on the amount of wear and the precise state of moult. In all, the iridescent region of the nape is generally well defined from the back, and though reasonably well demarcated, cannot generally be said to merge with the brown colour of the rest of the mantle. Such slight variation as occurs seems to be individual and without racial significance. The single Nigerian specimen examined, too, cannot be separated from any of the general series from Central Africa or from the two South African birds. Birds in non-breeding dress do not appear to differ in any way either, nor is there any demonstrable size difference between any of the populations examined.

Unfortunately I have not personally been able to examine the type of *C. t. wahlbergi* housed in the British Museum (Natural History), but Mrs. B. P. Hall has kindly examined it on my behalf. It was originally collected by Wahlberg in 1840 and though now over 120 years old, is stated to be in an excellent state of preservation and still retains the original collector's label. Further, it appears to have been prepared by Wahlberg himself, as it is skinned from under the wing, the technique he used. On the basis of colour Mrs. Hall states that the original description by Grant fits perfectly and this is also true of the rather more detailed diagnosis given by Sharpe (1875-84) based on the same specimen, but this author does not mention the shade of gloss. The fact, however, that the populations under discussion do prove to have the head blue-black rather than an oily green, fits far more closely the facts and the only discrepancy remaining lies in the mantle colour and to whether or not the nape is strongly demarcated or not from the rest of the back, and as already shown there is considerable individual variation in this respect. Mrs. Hall states further that the type in regard to the head, matches in the glossy sheen, specimens of *C. t. caeruleiceps* from the Sudan, and this fact was stressed by Grant (1915). It has not been possible to examine any specimens from East Africa, north of Lake Rukwa, but it would seem probable, that on the examination of longer series, that *C. t. caeruleiceps* may prove also to be a synonym of *C. t. grillii*. However, Neumann, in the original description of *C. t. caeruleiceps* stated that the lesser under wing-coverts in this form were black, but Grant (*op. cit.*) noted that one specimen from Nyasaland showed this character, but that others from the same Territory were normal. Of the series available in this study, all have the under wing-coverts rufous.

Despite the fact that the species is rare or local over much of its continental range, and at the present day divisible into a number of apparently discontinuously distributed populations, geographical variation is not very apparent, if indeed it really exists at all. Lack of adequate series prevents any final conclusions being reached at this stage.

J. G. Williams (*in litt.*) mentions that he has never collected it personally in East Africa. At the present day it is unknown from anywhere near the type locality and is unrepresented in the collection of the Durban Museum (Clancey *in litt.*), and has been visually recorded no nearer than ninety to a hundred miles north of the type locality (Lawson, personal communication). Recent developments and ecological changes associated with replacement of the natural habitat by sugar cane, may have caused a local retraction of the specific range, as the type locality appears to be at the extreme southern limit of the species distribution. The supposed record by Levaillant from near the Zwart River in the Eastern Cape Province is founded on a bird from the Far East and represents another species (Neumann, 1902).

On the evidence assembled above, it becomes clear that it will be henceforth necessary to place *C. t. wahlbergi* C. Grant in the synonymy of *C. t. grillii* Hartlaub, so that all the birds south of the Zambesi River must in future be known by the older name, leaving the only other continental African race, *C. t. caeruleiceps*, whose status too, as a satisfactorily recognisable form must remain in considerable doubt, and seemingly restricted to the highlands of Kenya Colony northward to Abyssinia and westward to the Sudan and Uganda.

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The relative priority of the generic names *Uraeginthus* and *Granatina*.

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In his revision of the Estrildidae, Wolters (1957) combined the two genera *Uraeginthus* and *Granatina* to form a single genus under the latter name, an arrangement subsequently used by others. *Uraeginthus* was described by Cabanis in 1851. For *Granatina* Delacour (1943), Wolters (1957) and Steiner (1960) all cite "Bonaparte, *Conspectus Generum*